

*Little  
Henrietta*

LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

# Little Henrietta

by

LIZETTE WOODWORTH  
REESE

*Author of "A Branch of May"  
"A Handful of Lavender", etc.*

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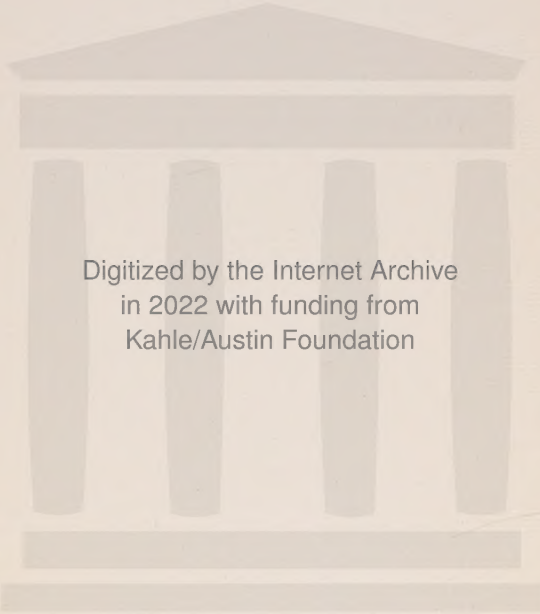
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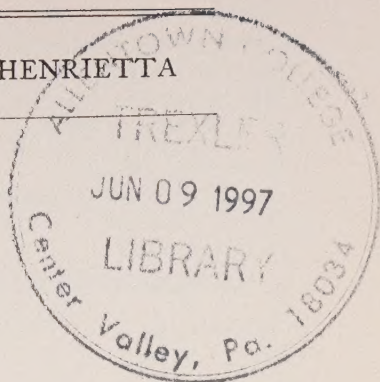
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LITTLE HENRIETTA

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*Books by*

LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

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*(Published by Thomas Bird Mosher)*

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SPICEWOOD  
WILD CHERRY



# Little Henrietta

By

Lizette Woodworth  
Reese

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— B —  
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IN MEMORY  
OF A  
LITTLE CHILD



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LITTLE HENRIETTA

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## SHELTER

**T**O be a lamb and have a fold  
Is better than a hoard of gold ;

Or dreams, or acres, or the sun ;  
Or a hard fight forever won.

Better than all that can be told  
Are a shepherd and a fold.

## LITTLE HENRIETTA

### I

**B**ETWEEN two roads stood the old village  
house;  
The first led north from the great harbor town,  
To that small one with the brief English name;  
The next, but a good wagon's length across,  
Ended in a gnarled gate, beyond which lay  
The stooped roofs of a farm:  
This kept within its curvings nine thorn trees,  
Fair, otherworldly, that a week in spring  
Could turn so phantom-white, it seemed to us,  
A touch would tumble them along the lane.

**T**HE house itself was a low, mellowed thing,  
In part of brick, in part of faded wood;  
Set for a century in the four great winds,  
Set in its years as in a mist of rain  
At edge of twilight, when a narrow sound,  
Silver in silver air,  
Pricks through each crack of the short, half-lit hour,  
Such was its look, and with that look was bound  
That of dim, fast-kept Aprils, crowded close,  
At every chimney, and about each door.

UNDER the kitchen sills a garden lay,  
Just two graves' length, held separate from  
the yard

By rain-nipped shells, laid in a loosened row;  
A box-bush clutched one corner; it was sad;  
Its odor made a difference in the sun.

There, in the early year,  
The crocus cupped its purple, its clear white:  
A few high scarlet tulips, too, were there;  
Snow-drops grass-long; and cowslips last of all,  
Like new-dripped honey, worth a full day's hire.

**A**T such a time, beyond the cherry-trees,  
Our daffodils, hugging their yellow crocks,  
Stood in a hush like that of laughter done,  
So many, they were more than one could count.  
The wind blew, blew a little; and the bees  
In the young light drawled by.  
The little wind turned to a little gust,  
Slapped at the pale, brief petals; down they fell  
To lodge like tufts of wool within the grass;  
And all the world was gust and cherry-bloom!

**A**ND all the world was cherry-bloom and gust!  
Behind the dropping white, at fall of dusk,  
Our ancient house went slipping out of sight,  
Its windows gleaming like rich satin there;  
Wrapped round in veils the last cart dwindled by:  
Across in Bowen's Farm,  
Shrilled the tall peacocks pacing in the dew—  
Distinct the sound as cracking of a pane—  
And the whole flame of sky rocked to the grass,  
Mixed with the flame of rocking daffodils.

**A**T such a time our Small Beloved came,  
Before the nine thorns down the Old York  
Road,

Broke into flower, each of the nine aloof  
By the dark fence, so separate a thing,  
Ghost of a ghost, it seemed as though it blew  
In some far Other Where.

Her name was ready, that of a young aunt  
A mile or two out of the village bounds,  
A sweet, thin-smiling girl, as clearly pale  
As a white mullein in a break of rain.

**H**ER mother went. There fell upon the house  
The sound of sudden crying all about,  
And then a silence, that was like a whip,  
One held too tightly in a too hard hand,  
And cracked, and cracked, and kept on cracking  
there  
Till all the air grew wild.  
We brought in cherry-boughs, that she might be  
As deep in April as her years had been ;  
We lit tall candles in the stilled long room,  
Lit them, and sobbed, and hushed, and sobbed again.



## VIII

**D**ARK, honied, gay, all gleam of cloud and pool,  
Our Small Beloved, not herself alone,  
But that dim Other ever seeming near.  
As often in a little and new song,  
The catch of breath in some long-silenced throat  
Goes, comes, and goes again,  
So did the Past in her. The Flemish sun  
Gave her that mother's voice, her sweet, quick smile;  
Her father's moodier weather had its share  
In Kent-blue eyes, a gusty lift of head.

**C**RAMPED her estate, but rare; a coppery cart;  
A woolen cock with stiff and impish head;  
Mallow-pink frocks; one blue as scilla buds,  
Misty with slender ribbons; decked in this,  
She drifted toward us, player of a part,  
And strangely, wholly French.  
Hers were round cakes, three currants on each top,  
And curious pricks of a long kitchen fork;  
And butterflies with rings of black and gilt,  
That she raced to the lane, and lost out there.

ONCE at her bed-time, in the peach-colored light,  
She stooped above a book, on whose rich page,  
Walked a great Shepherd, with His flock of sheep,  
Walked by clear waters, on a high, grave hill,  
And sobbed because we would not take Him out  
To stay with her at night,  
Clasped tightly in her arms; she sobbed, she kicked,  
Stamped through the room on dimpled, stormy feet.  
At last we brought her Blimbo; comforted,  
She held her fast, and in a little slept.

**B** LIMBO was of no breed ; there was no town  
 That held her roofs, or any kin of hers ;  
 A tall, soft, dangling creature, woven of rags,  
 And all of ochre, stone-gray, indigo ;  
 A thing of stares, and obscure, trickling smiles,  
 On a squat, painted face.  
 And she who had no mother of her own,  
 Made herself double parent to poor Blim,  
 Scolded and kissed her, to short, broken tunes  
 Set cuddling words, and sang her down to sleep.

**F**RRIEND of the peddler-woman, Hungary-born,  
Who stalked our roads, a shawled Autolycus,  
And swore fat oaths; and sold us pins and soaps;  
Friend of the butcher, who, in pear-green cart,  
Came thrice a week. With rosy, wheedling thumbs,  
She beckoned to her side  
His mottled dog that trotted by the wheels.  
She smiled the thief out of the lad astride  
Packed, scarlet cherry-boughs, and watched him go  
With virtuous strut, ear-deep in love with her.

SHE spent her days in happy marketings,  
Her wares the clump of buttercups in blow,  
And shrill with gold outside the cracking fence;  
Or, later on, a narrow, flowering switch  
Pulled from the high white elder in our lane;  
With this, an elf's pale rod,  
She tripped the grass a half hour at a time;  
Or pebbles stretched along the garden walk  
As smooth as water, gray as pea-hen's wing:  
These were her marketings, the pay herself.

**W**E grew a livelier folk because of her,  
A part of her fresh, easy art of life:—  
To give slick pats to small precipitate things  
Like beetles running blackly through the grass;  
To make, in its tried way, of moistened earth,  
A batch of proper pies.  
To splash through puddles of a smooth clove-brown,  
Left by a night's rain in our tight-fenced yard:  
To turn into a wolf, from a dark bush  
Rush out at some shrill cousin racing by.

**T**HAT April came when she was four years old,  
 And passed. And crowding on sad August  
 came.

Picked to the bone our roads lay in the blare  
 Of sun. On the cracked hedge a month-old dust  
 Stuck thick as meal from top-twigs to the roots;  
 Each sound struck like a stone  
 Dropped into a choked well. By the peeling fence  
 Our dahlias lighted a flat, scarlet blaze,  
 Seen a field's length across the stretched, hot land.  
 Blare, silence, drought. Then, of a sudden, Death!



WE could not think at first that she was dead;  
We could not think so bitter and hard a  
thing!

When a song hushes, do we not hear yet  
Its dwindling down the stubble of the air?  
Its silver stumbling on the flags without?  
Have we not waked at times,  
And found the bloom shaken off the apricot,  
And thought our eyes amiss? Was it not still  
Sea-white between the old panes and the road,  
And not a ghost's ghost fading down the grass?

**S**TRANGE to the strange was our old house to us,  
Bare of the jeweled sorcery of the spring,  
So torn and so un-Apriled in each part—  
Like bough struck by a gust, ready to sprawl  
A dripping width of obscure country mold—  
No longer was it ours.  
No table knew us, and no crook of stair,  
Or paper on the wall, or dish, or book;  
Nothing was left us but our years, our tears,  
Set in a world as naked as a bone.

**B**UT oh, my God, there was no change at all!  
 Still down the Old York Road nine thorn  
 trees stood,

Their haws a trifle scarlet. Still the hedge  
 Showed like split leather underneath the dust  
 That for a month had stuck there thick as meal;  
 The stretched, hot fields stayed on.

To think that a blue platter should remain,  
 That withered page, or village brier last,  
 Though all the worlds gave up their sweet and  
 young—

It was enough to crack the heart in you!

THEY said so much, so little, oh, my God!  
The folk who drifted in to comfort us.  
We saw them through a mist, each in a chair.  
*The common lot, the common lot*, they said.  
Again, again. We saw them through a mist  
Each upright in a chair.  
Was this enough to wrench us from our loss,  
Set in a world as empty as a spear?  
For could an old grief make our new grief less?  
A neighbor's bitter turn our bitter sweet?

***F**OR what we are about, Lord, to receive—*

Her father stood up straight. We see him yet.  
 We see the table with the glazed brown jug  
 Stuck full of fire-red dahlias from the yard,  
 The curds and bread, the pot of steaming tea.  
 The dusk stretched all about,  
 Laburnum-colored, hot. The lamp was lit.  
 And all at once we saw that small lost face  
 Gleam in the room between us and the dusk—  
*For what we are about.*—We hear him yet.

**P**OOOR staring Blimbo lay upon the floor  
Beside the coppery cart. We could not bear  
To closet these and set them out of sight:  
As long as they were left, then it must be  
That close at hand was their gay mistress too,  
All gleam of cloud and pool.  
And once we came upon a rosy frock  
Fallen under a dull chair. The house stood still  
To hear her going delicately by,  
Clad in that frock, along the listening stair.

**A** DAY of rain that ended in a wind,  
 The village turned a wild and silver place,  
 The west to pink like a drenched mallow bloom.  
 In the few orchards apples thudded down,  
 Heaping their blunt gold in the dark, soaked grass.  
 And every hurt of heart  
 The years had dealt, and that last hurt of all  
 Gnawed through the high, sad dripping of the  
     spouts  
 Down through the very texture of each thought,  
 And left us naked by a churchyard wall.

WAS life henceforth to be but days, days, days,  
That a few hundreds make into a year?  
Like coins to measure out with bargaining hand,  
Enough for roof, cloak, so much weight of bread?  
Had we been stripped for this and nothing more?  
For nothing more at all?  
Yet what was lodging without loveliness?  
Cloak without laughter, loaf without a song?  
Could one brief grave out in the autumnal wet,  
Serve us such scarceness, strip us down to this?



WE could not bear to see in the old grass,  
In the old walled yard, her new little grave.  
We could not bear it. Had we left her there,  
To kin with cold oblivion and the dark,  
Kept from her lovers and the good stout sun,  
And all the spinning year?  
Trapped underground to dole her April out  
For some end of the hard and aged dust?  
We could not bear it. One cry broke from all:  
“My God, my God, You have forgotten us!”

**T**HEN came the rector through the September  
gusts,

A gray, pinched man. He held a picture out.

"This is my son, my son dead twenty years."

The tense voice cracked. "My son, my son," he  
said.

And of a sudden our new grief was his old,

His old grief was our new,

And we were kin-fast by the bond of death.

Home through the swaying golden trees he went;

And all the rest of that strange day we felt

A little warmed, a little comforted.

**A**ND once a fog of asters in a wood  
 Clutched us, and we laughed out before we  
 knew—

It was so purple and so clear a thing,  
 Deep in the yellow quiet of the wind—  
 Then hushed, wet-eyed. How could we laugh at  
 all

Our Small Beloved gone?  
 Yet still thereafter some tried homeliness,  
 Some ancient constancy of sound or sight—  
 Like cow-bells trickling airily down a hill,—  
 Began to heal us, make us whole again.

**G**OD must have made the autumn days for us  
To sit us down and get us comfort in,  
By a spent tree, in a great solemn field.  
A half-wind stirs the falling leaves, and makes  
A swirl of grizzled gold. Black overhead  
A crow caws once, no more.  
There is a sense of harbor all about,  
For weather-battered, part-remembered things;  
Of shelter for the dwindled loveliness,  
To be set loose when shelter's need is done.

AND when we saw a shepherd in a lane,  
 We thought of folds. And a wild damson  
 bough,

In second flowering—made us think of spring;

It was a hand upon the latch of home.

Out of the common recompense of life,

By littles we began

To measure loss by gain; and wrecks by ports;

And darks by lamps; a beggar's sack by gold.

That we had loved we knew; now were we sure,

That having loved, we had not lost at all.

**T**HAT, having loved, we had not lost at all.  
Upon this note we beat a constant tune,  
That filled the house, and ebbed out to the lanes;  
That made us rich beyond all reckonings  
With ghostly stuffs unkept by any stall,  
And gables in the sky;  
A candle that no wind could bluster out;  
A hoard that no thief could break through or steal:  
For what was first, what last, were but the same;  
For the beginning and the end were God.

FOR the beginning and the end were God.  
All splendors and all valors took our part;  
The light on roof was that of battles won;  
The indomitable blue of flower called  
From our own doorstep and the frosty mold,  
Unto a ghostlier strife,  
Where two should wage where was but one before.  
Then rouse, spent, aching hearts! Blow, bugles,  
    blow!  
Enough of time to seize our swords aright;  
Enough of space to fight in or to fall.

**T**HE world was full of cowards. Would we be  
Of that poor number blotting out the sun,  
Bewildering the simple stuff of life?  
That whimpered at a blow, ran from the task  
Of bitter harvesting which comes to all?  
A brief space were we caught  
Within the stubble of a piteous grief,  
A pinched, autumnal place, yet lit by love,  
A thread that showed our stumbling feet the  
track;—  
Now soon the sweat and clamor of the fight!



WE never asked that heaven would tumble down  
 About our doors, that we might pick and  
 choose—

As it were village dust—a chrysoprase,  
 A chalcedony, or a beryl stone.

*Eye hath not seen, neither hath the ear heard.*

Enough that she was there.

What Love had taken, that would Love return;

Dreams to the dreamer; singer to his songs;

Lover to lover; mother to her son;—

No wall to bar, no sea to separate.

AND the great fields stayed on. In the old  
house

Table, and plate, and book were ours once more;

Each held a new, a lovelier loveliness:

Something of her, a touch, a look, a sense,

Had gone into the texture of them all;

Though ours, yet each was hers.

With one hand grasped we the old bitter dust,

With one the pinions of the Seraphim.

A double wealth, of earth, of heaven, was ours,

That we must run and spend, and spend again.

**Y**ET there were times so far from us she seemed!  
Alas, alas, she was so near, so near!

It was too bitter and too hard a thing—  
But was there not a house unmade by hands,  
Whose builder and whose maker was our God?—  
Alas, alas, so near!

When spring is close, we think of naught but spring,  
An old lane full of lovers, a wild hedge  
Pouring its silver down a silver gust:—  
Had He not said there would be no more sea?

**A**PRIL again. Our daffodils were out,  
Hugging their yellow crocks in the young  
light,

So many that we could not count them all.  
We pulled a great armful, and past the thorns,  
Along the Old York Road, came to her grave,  
And shook it softly down.

"To be a lamb, and have a fold," we said,  
"Is better than all dreams, or any gold,"  
And cried a little there within the hush.  
We missed her. Yet to miss is not to lose.

DOWN in the crooking road the butcher's  
cart,  
The women loud about it, made a blob  
Of dull pear-green. A white plum-tree stood near.  
Closer at hand the sexton clipped a bush.  
That short and lonely noise in the soft air,  
Half music as it was,  
And the shrill folk below were all we heard.  
Dark, early bees flew by. There in the hush  
We missed her; every thought came but to this:  
That she was sweet and young, that she was dead!

**W**E missed her. But to miss is not to lose.  
She was too delicate and brief a stuff  
To spend upon the durable common lot;  
Too morning-fair to last our sad days out.  
April was her sole weather of the year;  
None other held her fast.  
Yet had she stamped her April everywhere,  
Of her spent petalings left us a shred—  
The honied flower of her small lost face,  
The little music of her going by.

**T**HEN burst the organ in that ancient church  
 Into a wide, soft laughter, in a place  
 Washed with quince-yellow, blue and purple lights.  
 The world turned into music. West and east  
 Were met and comforted. And there was peace.  
 The peace of God flamed by.  
 Oh, Life, grown lovelier because of Death!  
 Clap your worn hands. Break not, break not, oh,  
     heart!  
 Where is your victory, Grave; where, Death, your  
     sting?—  
 Went by a flame that was the peace of God.

OLD days are over, and old sorrows gone;  
 The unchimneyed fields, and the low  
 mellowed house

Set for a century in the four great winds  
 Are perished with the nine trees in the lane.  
 Yet still those quiet levels hold her grave,  
 Old, now, in the old grass,

A little sad. What have we kept of all?—

That Love, being lit of God, fails not or ends:  
 That years are but His way to make us climb;  
 And tears His way to make us understand.



## AN EPITAPH

**H**ERE is a music ended;  
A golden treasure done,  
A book gone to the gust,  
A flower to dust.

That song may sing and call;  
A hoard grow full again,  
A book be read of men;  
A flower blow by a wall;—

That heaven may befall,  
To God we render all.

Alleluia.









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